



AFTER GALLIPOLI THERE WAS STILL A WAR TO BE WON.



BENEATH HILL 60

A **STUDY GUIDE** BY ROBERT LEWIS



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Allied soldiers caught in Western Front barrage

OVERVIEW

Beneath Hill 60 (Jeremy Sims, 2010) is an Australian feature film set underneath the trenches of World War One. This never-before-told Australian story takes place during 1916 and 1917, when Queensland miner Captain Oliver Woodward (played by Brendan Cowell) – undertrained and never having faced hostile fire before – finds himself on the Western Front, the bloodiest battlefield in history.

His new fiancée, seventeen-year-old Marjorie (Bella Heathcote), has pleaded with him not to enlist. She has only just discovered love and cannot believe that it could be taken from her. But men with Woodward's underground skills are desperately needed so that a deadly German offensive can be countered.

The film is based on the memoirs of Captain Woodward of the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company, which was responsible for the mines set under 'Hill 60' – an elevated point that dominated that part of the killing fields of Belgium. The tunnellers' bravery in developing these underground mines and the subsequent massive explosions broke the gridlocked trench warfare of the previous three years.

Young German coal miners Ernst Wagner (Marcus Costello)

and Karl Babek (Kenneth Spiteri) have also been thrust into the war. They have been brought, along with thousands of other men and boys, from the mining villages of Bavaria.

The soldier-miners from both sides drive their narrow tunnels under 'no-man's-land'. Attempting to out-manoeuvre and undermine each other, they create a great labyrinth of tunnels. It's a silent and savage war where one tiny sound can turn a man from hunter to hunted, and where skilled listeners are more sought after than fighters.

After two years of claustrophobia, bloodshed, triumph and heartbreak, it all comes down to a single moment. As infantrymen quietly fix bayonets in the darkness, Oliver Woodward crouches in a muddy bunker preparing to press a detonator that could change the course of the war ...



1: Marjorie Waddell (Isabella Heathcote) 2: Marjorie and Captain Oliver Woodward (Brendan Cowell)
3: Sapper Frank Tiffin (Harrison Gilbertson) 4: Battle of Messines map

CURRICULUM APPLICABILITY

Beneath Hill 60 is appropriate for middle and senior secondary students in History / SOSE / HSIE (Australia in the First World War) and English (the theme of war).

BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

Activity 1: Record your initial ideas

Most students know something about Australia and the First World War. The commemorations of Gallipoli on ANZAC Day (25 April) and Armistice Day or Remembrance Day (11 November) are observed every year and are part of our national culture and identity.

Beneath Hill 60 is a film about aspects of Australian soldiers' experience and the First World War.

Before you watch the film, look at the table on page 4 of this study guide. Read through the aspects listed in column A and record what you know and what you think about them in Column B.

Then you can return to this table after watching the film and see if your knowledge and ideas have changed.

This is not a test, so don't try to look up answers or rely on other people's ideas. Just record your own answers – watching the film and returning to these answers will have a greater impact and be of more benefit to you.

Activity 2: Reading background information on the war in 1916–1917 to understand the context of the film

The war between Britain, France and Russia and their allies against Germany, Austria-Hungary and their allies had been in progress since August 1914.

There were two main fronts in the war:

- the Western Front, which extended from the North Sea near the border of Belgium and France to the Swiss border
- the Eastern Front, which was land near the border between Germany and Austria-Hungary and Russia.

The Western Front, 1916

Beneath Hill 60 is set near the northern end of the Western Front, in the area near the Belgian city of Ypres. It is set in late 1916 and early 1917, in the lead up to the Battle of Messines.

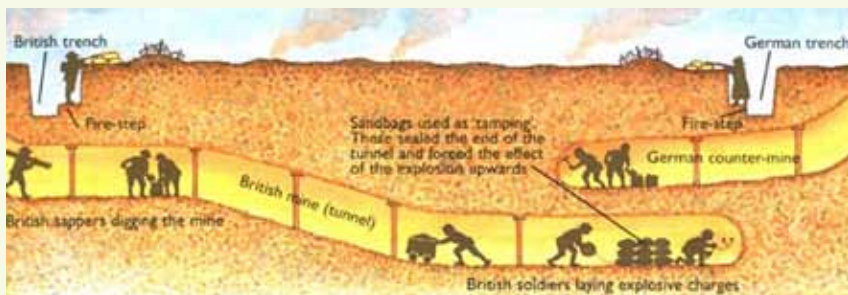
By 1917 the fighting on the Western Front had become trench warfare. The opposing sides faced each other and tried to take the other's ground.

Occasionally there were major attacks to try to push the other side back, but mostly the war involved the daily circumstances of artillery shelling, occasional small attacks, raids, sniping and gas attacks.

A. ASPECT OF AUSTRALIANS' EXPERIENCE IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR	B. BEFORE WATCHING <i>BENEATH HILL 60</i>	C. AFTER WATCHING <i>BENEATH HILL 60</i>	D. TESTING <i>BENEATH HILL 60</i> AS A REPRESENTATION OF HISTORY AFTER RESEARCH
When were Australian soldiers involved in the war?			
Where were they involved?			
What was the fighting like?			
What were the conditions like?			
What were some attitudes of the men involved towards the war?			
What were their attitudes to the enemy?			
What qualities did they show?			
What were their relationships like with each other?			



ABOVE: Map of the Western Front BELOW: Taken from <<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWtunnelling.htm>>



The generals of each side had the dream of launching one last great offensive that would break the other side and lead to victory. The defenders, with well-situated machine guns and barbed-wire protection, had the great advantage in any attack.

But there was another type of war being fought. This was a war under

The Western Front was a flat environment. This meant that any hill, even a tiny one, gave the men holding it a great advantage in terms of being able to see what the enemy was doing. The worst fighting was around these tiny hills in Belgium. Hill 60 was one such tiny rise, which made it a place to be fought for or destroyed.

During winter a major 'enemy' for both sides was the weather, with rain and snow creating waterlogged trenches and turning the artillery-churned 'no-man's-land' between the facing trenches into treacherous mud and water holes. The soil in the area was a heavy clay that clung to everything it touched. It could suck unwary men and horses in and drown or suffocate them.

the ground. If one side could tunnel under the enemy's lines it could plant explosives that would kill thousands of enemy operatives in one hit. Each side was trying to do this, using men who were miners and engineers in civilian life. It was difficult and dangerous work – the land was swampy, the clay was hard to dig, the closeness of the enemy meant that if each side could hear the other digging it could collapse the enemy's tunnels and bury the men alive.

In 1917, the Allies were planning a major attack which was to be called the Messines offensive. If the tunnellers could detonate explosives under the enemy's trenches, it would weaken the enemies lines, thereby aiding the forthcoming attack.

This is the context of the film *Beneath Hill 60*.



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1: Woodward and McBride (Anthony Hayes) receive orders from General Lambert (John Stanton) **2:** German Kommandeur Fusslein (David Ritchie) and Sergeant Babek (Kenneth Spiteri) **3:** Colonel Rutledge (Chris Haywood) and General Lambert **4:** Woodward and Lambert in the firing bunker **INSET LEFT:** Kenneth Spiteri as German tunneller Karl Babek

EXPLORING IDEAS AND ISSUES IN THE FILM

Beneath Hill 60 covers many ideas and issues that can be explored in history.

Look at the following headings. In each case, discuss what the film says about them. Then complete Column C of the table on page 4.

Nature of the war

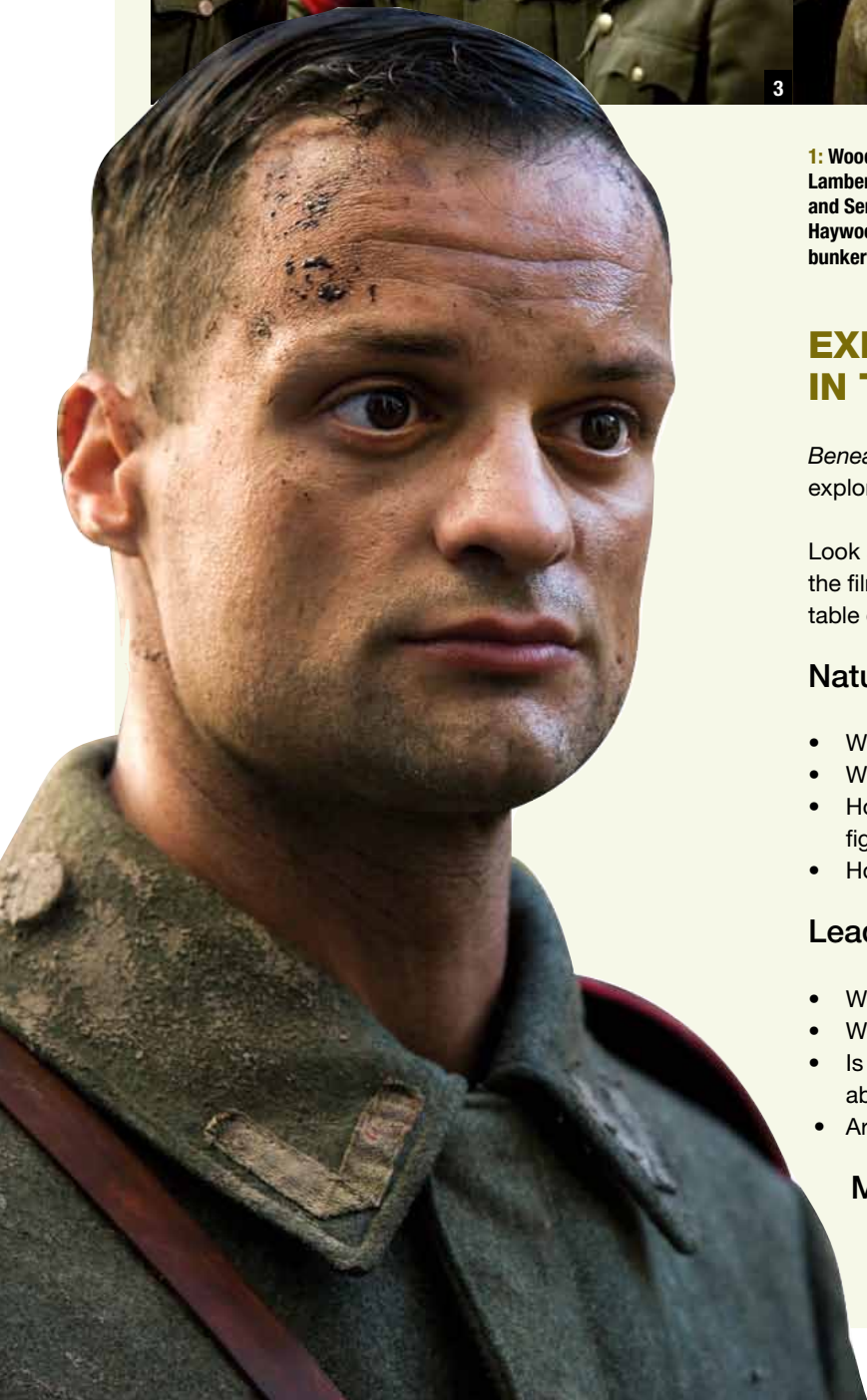
- What is the nature of the fighting?
- What are the conditions like?
- How do the men react to the conditions and the fighting?
- How are they able to survive?

Leadership

- Who are the leaders in the film?
- What are the key qualities that make a good leader?
- Is Woodward a natural leader, or does he have to learn about leadership?
- Are there other good leaders among the men?

Mateship

- One of the qualities that is usually presented in Australian fiction and non-fiction about the war is





1: Explosion over No Man's Land 2: Kommandeur Fusslein 3: Infantrymen in the trenches 4: Barrage behind the lines

the idea of mateship. How is mateship presented in the film?

- Who are seen to be 'mates'?
- Does mateship extend to everyone in the group, or is it more exclusive?
- Is it always a positive thing?
- Does it extend beyond rank so that officers and men can be mates?
- Is it exclusive to the Australians?

Bravery and fear

- What does it mean to be brave in war?
- Are those who show fear cowards?
- Who are the bravest people in the film?
- Why were men so ready to face death during the war?

The British

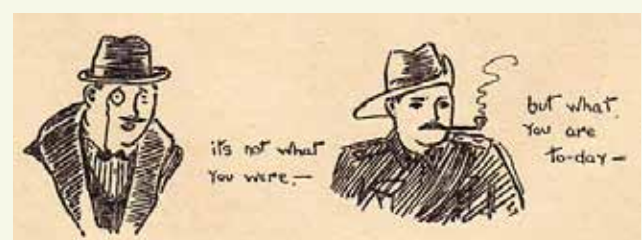
- How are the British depicted in the film?
- Is there a difference between the depiction of British officers and the ordinary British soldiers?
- How is class presented in the film?

The Germans

- How are the Germans depicted in the film?
- Is there a difference between the depiction of German officers and the ordinary German soldiers?
- What are the attitudes of the opposing soldiers towards each other?

The ANZAC legend

- There is a popular image of the Australian soldier – brave, resourceful, disrespectful of authority, a bit of a larrikin, a good mate, easy-going, a bad soldier but a good fighter. Together these images create the ANZAC legend.
- Does the film confirm or does it challenge this image?
- Does the film glorify the Australian soldier?
- Does the film glorify war, or does it condemn it? Or is there a more complex attitude to it?
- Is this image something that is still relevant to young people today?
- Below is a cartoon that was published in *The ANZAC Book* in 1916. *The ANZAC Book* was a collection of articles, drawings, cartoons and stories put together from contributions of ANZACs at Gallipoli. It helped create the ANZAC legend. The cartoon is a statement about a part of the ANZAC legend. To whom could this cartoon apply in the film?





1: Tunnellers Fraser (Steve Le Marquand) and Morris (Gyton Grantley)
2: Oliver Woodward **3:** German tunnellers Babek and Wagner (Marcus Costello) **4:** Wagner climbs the shaft **INSET RIGHT:** German tunneller

Home front

- What are the home front pressures on men to enlist?
- Why are civilians so ready to send men to the war?
- Why do the filmmakers stress the relationship between Woodward and Marjorie?

After the war

- What happened to the soldiers after the war?
- How did the war continue to affect them?
- Could these men be normal again after the war?
- How might their experiences have created a special bond between them?
- The film ends by showing photographs of the real people. Is this an effective device? Why or why not?

Making the film

- What do you think were the main problems or difficulties that would face the filmmakers in making this film?
- How have they overcome these?
- How successful is the film?
- The filmmakers promote the film so that it reaches the largest possible audience. This is done in many ways, including through a summary of the film (such as the one on page 2 of this study guide), trailers (see the website) and posters (see below). Choose one of these three promotional methods and critically





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1: Tunnellers Percy (Warwick Young) and Jim Sneddon (Alan Dukes) **2:** Tunneller Billy Bacon (Mark Coles Smith) heads for the try line
3: Tunneller Walter Sneddon (Alex Thomson) grieves for his father **4:** Captain Woodward and Canadian Major North (Aden Young)

analyse the effectiveness of that means of promoting the film.

Fact and fiction

- The film claims that it is based on fact. What do you expect of a film that makes this claim?
- One of the key incidents in the film, the trapping of Frank Tiffin (Harrison Gilbertson) in the mine as the explosives are about to be fired, did not happen in real life. Does this affect your evaluation of the film as historically accurate?

The film as a representation of history

- This film is a representation of history – that it, it is the filmmakers' version of history. The filmmakers chose what to include, what to exclude, how to organise the events and how to present them. Is it a fair and accurate version of the reality of this aspect of the war? Is it something you can look at and reasonably say 'Yes, it really must have been like that'? To decide, you need to go back to the table on page 4 and research further in order to complete Column D.

Evaluation

- Do you think the film is a successful one? Write a review of the film in which you explain your reasons.

- Do you think the film has relevance to young people today? Justify your views.
- What do ANZAC Day and Remembrance Day mean to you today?

FURTHER INFORMATION

AWM PHOTOS

To help your consideration of *Beneath Hill 60* as a representation of history go to the Australian War Memorial website at <<http://www.awm.gov.au>> and search Collections for images of Hill 60 and the 1st Australian Tunnelling Company.

BOOK

You can also look at the Will Davies' book, *Beneath Hill 60*, which presents the story from an accurate historical perspective.

Will Davies, *Beneath Hill 60*, Random House, 2010.

Beneath Hill 60 WEBSITE

You can find out more about the making of the film on the film's website <<http://www.beneathhill60movie.com.au>>. •

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1: Back from the war, the surviving tunnellers attend Woodward and Marjorie's wedding

All photographs from *Beneath Hill 60* by Wendy McDougall



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